1: Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

589 765 dition that she does not remarry; the idea being that as long as the bones remain in the widow's keeping, the spirit of her husband is still with her. On this account many wives who revere their husband's memories, and who do not contemplate 587 765 remarriage, purposely keep the bones for a long time. If a widow marries, even after the customary taboo period of one year, whilst her deceased husband's bones are still in her keeping, [346] she is generally looked down upon. Her children in such a case perform the ceremony of handing over the bones of their father to his clan in a building specially erected for the purpose. The widow cannot enter therein, or even go near it, whilst the ceremony is proceeding, no matter whether the *jing sang*, or the price for removing the taboo after a husband's death, has been 595 paid to the husband's clan or not. There is no evidence to show that polyandry ever existed amongst the Khasis. Unlike the Thibetans, the Khasi women seem to have contented themselves always with one husband, at any rate with one at a time. Certainly at the present day they are monandrists. Polygamy does not exist amongst the Khasis; such a practice would naturally not be in vogue amongst a people who observe the matriarchate. There are instances, however, of men having wives other than those they have regularly married, and in the War country children by such wives enjoy rights to their father's acquired property equally with the children by the legally 582 688 764 married wife. As the clans are strictly exogamous, a Khasi cannot take a wife from his own clan; to do this would entail the most disastrous religious, as well as social consequences. For to marry within the clan is the greatest sin a Khasi can commit, and would cause excommunication by his kinsfolk and the refusal of funeral ceremonies at death, and his bones would [115] not be allowed a resting-place in the sepulchre of the clan. To 614 582 give a list of all the Khasi exogamous clans would perhaps serve no useful purpose, but I have prepared from information, kindly furnished me by the Siems of Khyrim and Cherrapunji, a list of the clans in those States which will be found in Appendices A and B. These will suffice as examples. It will be seen from the Cherra list that the different divisions of the Diengdoh clan, viz. Lalu, Diengdoh-bah, Diengdoh-kylla, are prohibited from intermarriage; this is due to those branches of the clan being

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586 Khasi religion. If the marriage has been celebrated according to the *pynhiar synjat* rite, a *ksiang* (go-between) is necessary on each side, also the *kni*, or maternal uncles of the parties, to witness the divorce. In other cases the presence of the *ksiang* is unnecessary, but some acquaintances and friends as well as the relatives on both sides should witness the ceremony. The husband and the wife each bring five cowries (*sbài*), or, more commonly nowadays, five pice. The wife gives her five cowries or pice to her husband, who places them with his, and then returns the five cowries or coins to his wife, together with his own five. The wife then returns the ten shells or coins to the husband who throws them on the ground. A crier (*u nõng* [203] *pyrta shnong*) then goes round the village to proclaim the divorce, using the following words :—

"Kaw—hear, oh villagers, that U—— and K—— have become separated in the presence of the elders. Hei! thou, oh, young man, canst go and make love to Ka—— for she is now unmarried (*khynraw*), and thou, oh, spinster, canst make love to U——. Hei! there is no let or hindrance from henceforth." Among the Khasis divorce must be by mutual consent, [587] and the ceremony must take place in the open air. Until the divorce ceremony has been performed as above described, neither husband nor wife can marry again, but after it has taken place, either can remarry, but not within the family of the divorced husband or wife. In the event of a husband or wife being absent for a long period, say ten years, without any communication having been received from either of them, a divorce ceremony is performed by the relatives on his or her behalf. It is stated by U Jeebon Roy * that the rule of 595 monogamy is not so strict for the husband as it is for the wife, 428 he can contract an informal alliance with another woman, the only prohibition being that she must not belong to the original wife's village. Such a wife is called *ka tynga tuh*, literally, stolen wife, in contradistinction to the legally married wife (*ka tynga trai*). The children by the unmarried wife are called *ki khun kliar* (children from the top). By children from the top, is understood to mean children from the branches not from the root (*traj*) of the tree. Such children cannot claim ancestral property, except in the War country. 113

* See page 18, "Ka Niam Khasi." (U Jeebon Roy.)

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Thus, the marriage of a non-heiress and a man of authority also produces an unstable position for the husband in spite of his having an independent household. Therefore, the possibility of a really stable marriage is even more limited; it will occur only in the match of a non-heiress and a non-authority of the *iing*. But even these marriages cannot be free from the influence of a matrilineal social structure: the man of authority of the wife's *iing* may visit these couples now and then, curb the husband's power and remind both partners of the orientation towards the matri-kin, the *iing*, though this pressure is insignificant in comparison with that experienced by the heiress's family. Likewise, a husband now and then visits his youngest sister's house, *ka iing sen*. These constant matrilineal contacts offer husbands chances of escaping from even the slightest matrimonial tension. Whenever a Khasi man feels uneasiness, he will return to his sister's house rather than face a difficult situation with his wife. This tendency is maximised especially on the occasion of religious ceremonies, when all individuals are grouped around each *iing*.

It is apparent that the rules of the *iing* as the underlying structural pattern, function throughout the various categories of domestic unit of the Khasi community as the most important intrinsic force.

VII. Polygyny

After this long attempt at the structural analysis of marriages, I think one can theoretically predict what is the situation of polygyny among the Khasi. The theoretical framework elaborated through preceding discussions can also be tested by the empirical data in terms of polygyny.

Nowadays, the Khasi feel so strongly against polygyny that they have no knowledge even that they ever practised it. Many Khasi, in more sophisticated areas, did not believe my findings on polygyny in Sohkynduh and Kongton. I think this is due to the rapid Christianization of the Hills during the last hundred years. My interpreter, though he was not Christian, said to me in the village, "it is most regrettable to bring you to a village where we find polygyny." However, one of the ministers of the Cherra State to which the two villages belong, told me that there was no particular opposition to polygyny, though recent Christian influence gave people the idea that it was a shameful custom, and he mentioned the case of a polygynist in his area, a man who had recently died, who had had ten wives. In Jatinga whose inhabitants are all Christian, and in Shella where there has been much contact with, and influence by, Hindus, there were

1:Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

marry any one belonging to your own *kur*, or clan. Unlike the Khasis, however, a Lyngam can marry two sisters at a time. The Lyngam marriages are arranged by *ksiangs*, or go-betweens, much in the same way as Khasi marriages; but the ritual observed is less elaborate, and shows a mixture of Khasi and Garo customs (see Section III.). The Lyngams intermarry with the Garos. It appears that sometimes the parents of girls exact bride-money, and marriages by capture have been heard of. Both of these customs are more characteristic of the Bodo tribes of the plains than of the Khasis. There are no special birth customs, as with the Khasis, except that when the umbilical cord falls a fowl is sacrificed, and the child is brought outside the house. Children are named without any special ceremony. The death customs of the Lyngams have been described in Section III. A peculiar characteristic is the keeping of the dead body in the house for days, sometimes even for several months, before it is burnt. The putrefying corpse inside the house seems to cause these people no inconvenience, for whilst it remains there, they eat, carry on their ordinary avocations, and sleep there, regardless of what would be considered by others an intolerable nuisance. The religion of these people consists of a mixture of ancestor-worship and the propitiation of the spirits of fell and fall, which are, most of them, believed to be of evil influence, as is the case with other savage races. As with the people of Nongstoin, the primaeval ancestress, "*ka Iaw bei*," is worshipped for the welfare of the clan, a sow being sacrificed to her, with a gourd of rice-beer, and leaves of the oak, or *dieng-sning* tree. The leaves of the oak are afterwards hung up inside the house, together with the jaw-bone of the pig. Sacrifices are offered to a forest demon, *U Bang-jang* (a god who brings illness), by the roadside; also to *Ka Miang Bylli U Majymma*, the god of cultivation, at seed time, on the path to the forest clearing where the seed is sown. Models of paddy store-houses, baskets and agricultural implements are made, sand being used to indicate the grain. These are placed by the roadside, the skulls of the sacrificial animals and the feathers of fowls being hung up on bamboos about the place where the sacrifice has been performed. There are no priests or *lyngdohs*, the fathers of the hamlet performing the various ceremonies.

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

178 no polygynists, though there were many personal temporary illicit
184 relations or love affairs.

It is true that even in interior villages polygyny is rapidly decreas-
• 595 ing. In the two villages I found only two cases of polygyny: a man with two wives in Sohkynduh (Josio in List 6, whose wives are 26 and 32), and a man with three wives in Kongton (Jubongrai in List 9, whose wives are 8, 20 and 52). These cases appeared clearly as cases of polygyny which the villagers recognized as such, speaking of them quite differently from the way they would have spoken of lovers, calling them wives and husbands. Of course, the first wife socially outranks the secondary wives, as *ka tynga trai*, and the term *ka tynga tuh* is used for the latter, as Gurdon states (1914, p. 80). The difference being that the first wife has a legal marriage ceremony while the
585 others have not—*ka tynga tuh* means literally 'stolen wife.' About
595 the marriage ceremony, Gurdon gives a detailed discription (*ibid.*, pp. 127-130) and says there are three forms of marriage ceremonies, *Pynhiarsynjat*, *Lamdoh* and *Iadih-hiad*. The first and second forms are considered the more respectable; the last one is resorted to by the very poor who cannot afford the greater expense entailed by the first two. Unfortunately, during my stay in these villages, no marriage ceremony took place, but villagers described to me what seems to be the *Iadih-hiad*, where only a fowl is sacrified, and the whole procedure is much simpler than that described by Gurdon. However, whatever the complexity and richness may be, there is a distinct line between having a ceremony and not having it, and this draws the distinction between the status of the first wife and that of the secondary wives.

428 Nevertheless, this distinction has more of a social bearing than the
595 legal bearing it has in a patrilineal system. Since they follow the
851 matrilineal system, the legal distinction between the first wife and the secondary wife does not affect their children's status and their property rights, at least not in the villages where I worked. The children's social locus is determined by their mother. The children (particularly the youngest daughter) have the right to inherit their father's acquired property which is automatically under their mother's ownership. If the polygynist father has acquired property by working their mother's field, or in trading on behalf of their mother, whether she be the first wife or the second, this property undoubtedly belongs to the children of that wife, not to the first wife alone. The father's physical locus at the time of his economic realisations is the decisive factor.

591 The Khasi polygynist, without bringing his wives into one house-
595 hold, alternates his residence among them, in turn or according to his temper. This practice is similar to that of the Trukese described by Goodenough (1951, p. 123), and quite different from that of the Garo

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

which I described previously, where a man brings his secondary wives to his first wife's house in which he is acting as the head. Furthermore, sororal polygyny is prohibited, while it was prefered among the Garo in terms of wives taken from the same ***mahari***, though mostly not real sisters. The strong jealousy, which I observed, among the Khasi wives of a polygynist, would appear to make such polygynous marriages with closely related women practically impossible. As shown in List 6 & 9 every single one of the wives of each polygynist belongs to different ***kur***, and the two secondary wives of the man of Kongton came from neighbouring villages.

These aspects of Khasi polygyny are related fundamentally to the underlying Khasi social structure. It should be remembered that every married woman has her independent household, *iing*, and that two women of different descent groups never reside together (see p. 127). The picture is one of every married woman holding a key-point in the whole network of the social system, and men fit into this network with much flexibility. The strong stability of women and the fluid nature of men in terms of residence naturally produces this form of polygyny. This analogy is also true of lovers' relations and illegal marriages. Though polygyny is a rapidly decreasing institution all over the Khasi Hills, cases of lovers' relations and illegal marriages are found to be very numerous among the Khasi, as compared with neighbouring tribes and peoples in Assam.

Throughout my discussions of various forms of Khasi marriage, I found men to be more or less in the position wittily described by one of them as "having one leg in my sister's house, the other in my wife's," except in cases of the husband/father who succeds in establishing paternal authority, as in marriages with a non-heiress. Even in the latter a man might have a period of uncertainty until his children were born and until the economic basis for his matrimonial life was firmly established. For the rest, Khasi men would be in the position of either becoming the authority of an *iing*, or swinging between their sister and their wife, which may produce more opportunities for lovers' relations. One of a man's legs is certainly always found in his sister's house, the other may rest in his wife's, but it may also rest in another woman's house. The wife being rather accustomed to his occasional absence due to his visits to his sister's house, another kind of absence does not mark any great change from the usual situation, at least not physically. Such situations occur particularly in the earlier stage of the marriage, as a sort of continuation of premarital affairs, which are quite freely practised: it is a usual custom before marriage for young men to sleep at a girl's house whom they like though they say sexual intercourse usually does not take place in such cases. This I observed in Sohkynduh and Kongton.

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

182 Because of the firm right of women over the residence, Khasi polygyny can never be a clearly distinguishable institution, and has no
• 595 operational advantage in the social and economic fields; the situation is very similar with lovers' relations and illegal marriages. By polygyny the man achieves no additional economic advantage, nor does he increase his social status or prestige; rather the reverse, for I observed that the polygynyst was regarded as a somewhat ludicrous or tragic figure. As for the woman, she is placed slightly at a disadvantage since the husband's economic activities are not concentrated on her household. However, even many legally-married wives are separated or divorced, so that such disadvantages are not only experienced by the wives of polygynists. The social disadvantage of being secondary wife is not serious, firstly, because wives, whether first or secondary, have social and economic independence—they do not belong to the husband as in the case of patrilineal systems. Secondly, the significance attached to the legal marriage institution is not so great, so that the handicap of being the secondary wife is not severe. What is most important, furthermore, is that her slightly inferior status does in no ways affect the next generation. Indeed such children, including
[848] those of premarital or illegal relations, suffer no serious social dis-
[851] advantage, though they are nominally distinguishable from legitimate children. From this it is clear that the effectiveness of legitimate marriage, and paternal recognition are rather limited among the Khasi.

Thus, Khasi polygyny differs greatly from the polygyny of other societies in terms of its operation and of its form. It also differs in the incentive to its practice. Among the Garo and many other societies, the practice of polygyny usually depends on a man's economic capability, but among the Khasi, it appears rather to depend on his
182 whim. Khasi husbands are notorious for their heavy drinking and
593 neglect of wife and children. Some of them told me that their earnings,
793 their children and everything they acquired go to their wife or sister, leaving them with nothing; therefore they should at least have freedom to enjoy their life. This freedom seemed to mean women and drink. I am not sure how far this explanation is true, but it seems to justify their behaviour to a certain extent. I do not mean that this is the general characteristic of the Khasi husbands, but some such tendency is to be observed. Actually I often heard wives complain of their husbands' drinking and running after women, and was asked "Are your Japanese husbands also like that?", "What is the good of having a husband!" then comes divorce . . .

182 On the contrary, women placed at an advantage by residence
562 and matrilineal inheritance, are required always to be on their best
593 behaviour. There are very strict rules governing the behaviour of Khasi women. They are supposed not to drink, smoke, or play with

15: Nakane E-5 (1955-1956) 1967 AR7 Khasi AR7

any man other than their husband. Women before marriage enjoy a considerable freedom in love affairs, but once married these are no longer tolerated. Women should be faithful wives. They should be so in order to keep their husbands who have a strong tendency to leave their wives. The husband of a woman who has an affair with another man, will never come back to her. There is no attraction to draw the husband, who has home at his sister's, to his wife's house unless she is good and charming. Such Gurdon's remarks as "There is no evidence to show that polyandry ever existed among the Khasis. Unlike the Tibetans, the Khasi women seem to have contented themselves always with one husband, at any rate with one at a time" (Gurdon, 1914, p. 77), is utterly nonsense: a Khasi woman is placed in a situation which is not easy to monopolize even one husband. Moreover, the Khasi social organisation in general does not accord to the practice of polyandry.

[P. 140 is blank]

20: Hunter G-4 (no date) 1897 AR7 Khasi AR7

strip of fine silk for the loins, a part of which hangs gracefully as low as the calves in front. No notice is here taken of what has undoubtedly been added and borrowed from their more civilised neighbours in the plains.

'MARRIAGE.—The marriageable age for females is from 15 to 18; for males, from 18 to 24. Matrimonial alliances are contracted either through the parents or the living representatives of the families to which the parties belong. The mode of procedure is still very primitive and unceremonious. The bridegroom, escorted by a number of friends and relatives, goes to the house of the bride, where all are feasted and lodged for the night; on the morrow he leads the bride, accompanied by a number of her relatives, to his own house, and entertains the company with dishes of boiled rice and fresh pork. After remaining there a day or two, the newly-married couple return together to the house of the wife, which becomes their future home. Marriage is dissoluble by regular divorce, for any sufficient cause, and often without any assignable reason except mutual dislike or want of issue, the latter being the most common case of all. Marriage with the Khásiás is simply a conventional arrangement, with nothing further for its object than the procreation of children; failing that, it is no longer looked upon as a contract permanently binding. Divorce is effected in the presence of eye-witnesses—the parents, or the heads of clans. Five cowries (*kauris*) are produced by the parties and exchanged, then cast away by mutual consent, and the ceremony is over. Parties once divorced can never again contract marriage with each other, but they are at liberty to marry into other families. Polygamy, strictly so called, is not sanctioned by Khásí custom. Adultery is looked upon as a serious crime. If the five cowries have not been cast away by mutual consent, both husband and wife are held to be subject to the "matrimonial demon;" and even when either dies in wedlock, the survivor is not at liberty to contract a fresh alliance until he or she pays the family a sum of money as the means of removing the surviving party from subjection to the "matrimonial demon." The husband is a stranger, so to speak, in the family he has entered, and perpetuates the race of others, not his own. The children in all questions of lineage and personal rights follow the mother. There are always two interests in the same family—that of the husband, and that of the wife. Whatever the husband may have earned or acquired in